

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Canceled)
2. (Currently Amended) A method for collecting and analyzing electronic discussion messages; wherein the method comprises the computer-implemented steps of:
 - (a) collecting a plurality of message information from a plurality of pre-determined electronic discussion forums;
 - (b) storing the plurality of message information in a central data store;
 - (c) categorizing the message information according to a plurality of pre-determined rules;
 - (d) assigning an opinion rating to the plurality of message information based on a plurality of pre-determined linguistic patterns and associative rules;
 - (e) collecting a plurality of objective data from a plurality of objective data sources;
 - (f) analyzing the message information and the objective data to identify trends in the pattern of behavior in pre-determined markets and the roles of individual participants in electronic discussion forums; and
 - (g) generating reports for end-users based on the results of the analyses performed by the present invention.
3. (Canceled)
4. (Currently Amended) A system for processing message traffic in a plurality of electronic discussion forums, comprising:
 - a computer-implemented message collector for collecting messages from the plurality of electronic discussion forums;
 - a computer-implemented message categorizer for processing the messages based on a series of topics; ~~and~~

a computer-implemented data analyzer for tracking a plurality of pseudonyms and the roles of individual participants using the pseudonyms posting in the plurality of electronic discussion forums based on the processing of the messages; and

a storage device containing a database storing configuration information for the plurality of electronic discussion forums; wherein

the message collector communicates with the database, thereby enabling the message collector to collect messages corresponding to a plurality of message formats or communications protocols.

5. (Previously Amended) The system of claim 4, wherein the message categorizer computes at least one relevance score for a message, the relevance score providing a measure of the relevance of the message to at least one topic for the series of topics.

6-12. (Canceled)

13. (Previously Amended) A system for processing message traffic in a plurality of electronic discussion forums, comprising:

a computer-implemented message collector for collecting messages from the plurality of electronic discussion forums;

a computer-implemented message processor for processing the messages according to a series of topics, wherein the message processor processes a message to compute a relevance of the message to at least one topic from the series of topics;

a computer-implemented data analyzer for tracking a plurality of pseudonyms posting in the plurality of electronic discussion forums based on the processing of the messages; and

a storage device for storing the messages; wherein

the message processor processes the messages to compute an opinion for the message based on a plurality of pre-determined linguistic patterns and associative rules according to the at least one topic.

14. (Original) The system of claim 13, wherein the opinion is computed based on a textual analysis of the message.

15-39. (Canceled)

40. (Currently Amended) A method for processing message traffic in a plurality of electronic discussion forums, comprising the steps of:

collecting messages from the plurality of electronic discussion forums;

processing the messages based on a series of topics; ~~and~~

tracking a plurality of pseudonyms and the roles of individual participants using the pseudonyms posting in the plurality of electronic discussion forums based on the processing of the messages; and

storing configuration information for the plurality of electronic discussion forums in a database, and wherein the step of collecting messages comprises collecting messages corresponding to a plurality of message formats or communications protocols.

41. (Previously Amended) The method of claim 40, further comprising the computer-implemented step of computing at least one relevance score for a message, the relevance score providing a measure of the relevance of the message to at least one topic from the series of topics.

42-47. (Canceled)

48. (Canceled)

49. (Previously Amended) A method for processing message traffic in a plurality of electronic discussion forums, comprising the computer-implemented steps of:

collecting messages from the plurality of electronic discussion forums;

processing the messages according to a series of topics and computing a relevance of the messages to at least one topic from the series of topics; and

tracking a plurality of pseudonyms posting in the plurality of electronic discussion forums based on the processing of the messages; wherein

the processing step further comprises the computer-implemented step of computing an opinion for the message based on a plurality of pre-determined linguistic patterns and associative rules according to the at least one topic.

50. (Original) The method of claim 49, wherein the step of computing an opinion comprises the step of performing a textual analysis of the message.

51-74. (Canceled)

75. (New) The system of claim 5, wherein the relevance score is computed based on a set of predetermined rules for each topic; and wherein the predetermined rules for each topic comprise a set of conditions defining information relevant to the topic.

76. (New) The system of claim 13, wherein the relevance score is computed based on a set of predetermined rules for each topic; and wherein the predetermined rules for each topic comprise a set of conditions defining information relevant to the topic.

77. (New) The method of claim 41, wherein the relevance score is computed based on a set of predetermined rules for each topic; and wherein the predetermined rules for each topic comprise a set of conditions defining information relevant to the topic.

78. (New) The method of claim 49, wherein the relevance score is computed based on a set of predetermined rules for each topic; and wherein the predetermined rules for each topic comprise a set of conditions defining information relevant to the topic.

79. (New) The method of claim 2, wherein the roles of individual participants are classified by correlating their postings with objective data relating to events external to the electronic discussion forum.

80. (New) The system of claim 4, wherein the roles of individual participants are classified by correlating their postings with objective data relating to events external to the electronic discussion forum.

81. (New) The method of claim 40, wherein the roles of individual participants are classified by correlating their postings with objective data relating to events external to the electronic discussion forum.